

Start and Finish - A Painted View Ranch 7,950'

As you line up at the start facing west along Hermit Road you will see two prominent peaks jutting east of the main divide of the Sangre de Cristo Range: Spread Eagle Peak (13,423') dominates just to the left of the road while Gibbs Peak (13,553') is at 1 o'clock. Behind and to the left of Spread Eagle and on the main spine of the Sangres is Rito Alto Peak (13,794'). The left hand/south slope of this peak descends to the marathon destination, Hermit Pass, although the saddle itself is obscured from view by a minor summit. The next peak south on the range crest is Hermit Peak (13,350').

Mile 1 - 8,015' (+65')

This is a pleasant warm-up mile gaining only 65' on a gravel surface county road through the open grasslands of the Wet Mountain Valley. Ahead, you can see where Hermit Road enters the lower tree line at about mile 3. To the south (left) are two prominent, rounded peaks that lie away from, east of the main divide: Horn Peak (13,450') is closest and Humbolt Peak (14,064') a bit farther to the south.

Mile 2 - 8,135' (+120')

Ahead, Spread Eagle Peak still dominates the view with Rito Alto Peak to the left and behind. The ridge of an unnamed 12,873' peak now obscures Hermit Peak. The slopes of the former Conquistador Ski Area (1970s) are now clearly visible below unnamed 12,873'. The route for both the half and full marathons utilizes the valley between the ski area ridge and the unnamed peak. This is the drainage of Middle Taylor Creek and Hermit Road continues in this valley all the way to the divide.

Mile 3 - 8,550' (+415')

The road grows gradually steeper as you approach the trees. Just before mile 3 is Aid Station 1 (at 2.85 miles) and the turnoff to the "real" Hermit Pass Road. After the Hermit Aid Station, enjoy a bit (a small bit) of downhill into the pine forest and the drainage of North Taylor Creek.

Mile 4 - 9,165' (+615')

You will shortly cross over North Taylor Creek. The road ascends up and over a ridge into the valley of Middle Taylor Creek. The gravel road is still good and County maintained. The view to the south is dramatic with the north side of Horn Peak dominating. You will enter San Isabel National Forest where the road begins to get a little rougher. Notice the hyperbolic increase in slope? Sure you do. Mile 4 is near the end of a relatively open south facing slope - probably warm but with great views.

Mile 5 - 9,970' (+815')

Just ahead is a short switchback where sane people will park their low-clearance vehicles. The drivability of the road deteriorates quickly. At the next switchback you'll arrive at the Rainbow Aid Station (9,698'). The Rainbow Trail comes in from the right and marathoners will take this trail on the way back. A tiny bit of downhill and level marks mile 5.

Mile 6 - 10,200' (+230')

Middle Taylor Creek will be on your left in a few hundred meters. The stream will be close by for the next mile. Midway you'll top out at a State Wildlife area where (yeah!!!) the road levels and becomes much less rocky. Enjoy it!

Mile 7 - 10,780' (+580')

Wave good-bye to the smooth road after about 1/3 mile. The road becomes 4-wheel drive only after this and ascends steeply up the hillside. If you are doing the half just be thankful that you only get to sample this. If you are doing the full marathon...get used to it. After just a few turns up this rougher road all runners arrive at the Half Marathon Turnaround Aid Station at 10,180'. Half marathoners joyously bound down the road to retrace their steps to the Painted View Ranch and the finish. Marathoners continue up, up, up...taking 4 switchbacks up the hill. At the fourth turn is Mile 7.

Mile 8 - 11,100' (+320')

The road, now less rocky and not so steep, traverses the south slopes of unnamed 12,671' far above Middle Taylor Creek. There is one set of switchbacks midway through this section and Mile 8 is at the next switchback within an avalanche path (just in the winter). You should be noticing the altitude by now.

Mile 9 - 11,640' (+540')

At 8.5 miles and at the first of 6 switchbacks pass the trail to Hermit Lake. Now follow the road even higher toward the summit of unnamed 12,671'. Mile 9 comes just before the sixth switchback.

Mile 10 - 12,050' (+410')

The trees are now getting sparse and the road is about to break out above timberline. Mile 9 to 10 is a long, relatively gentle traverse. The road is rocky and takes on the character of a typical above timberline track. The road turns south to gain a ridge and Hermit Lake is far below on your left. Eureka Mountain (13,607') is straight ahead. As the ridge is gained there is a spectacular view of Horseshoe Lake with the rugged east face of Hermit Peak behind. This is the first view of your goal, Hermit Pass, which lies at the low point in the ridge to the right of Hermit Peak. Rito Alto Peak looms above the pass. Welcome to the Horseshoe Lake Aid Station. It is at this point that runners may be turned around if weather threatens as the remainder of the course is quite exposed should lightning occur. If you provided anything for the equipment drop it will be here. You are now well above timberline. Mile marker 10 is just a bit past the aid station.

Mile 11 - 12,640' (+590')

The road switchbacks up a wide, south-facing slope. At about 10.6 miles a narrow ridge is gained where you will now be looking down on unnamed 12,671' which now lies to the east. You have circumvented this peak and now stand above it. The road now crosses close below the summit of unnamed 12,818' as you near the range crest. The west ridge of this peak is

then crossed and the road hugs the north slope of a narrow ridge leading west to Hermit Pass. Three switchbacks remain before the last push. Altitude is definitely a factor here.

Hermit Pass Aid Station 4 - 13,020' (+380')

You have come 11.56 miles to the crest of the Sangre de Cristo Range and the turnaround for the marathon. The "road" actually continues a short way down the west side of the range to an inactive mine. The San Luis Valley lies far below to the West. Rito Alto Lake is in the westerly basin nearly 2,000' below with rugged and unnamed 13,000' peaks behind. Turn around and view Horseshoe, Eureka and Hermit Lakes. Take a deep breath (or several) and plunge back down. All of the aid stations are still there and will serve on the descent. Watch your footing!!! The rock - loose or otherwise - is more treacherous on the way down and more difficult when you are tired. Enjoy the views but watch your step.

Deja Voux! Rainbow Trail Aid Station - 9,698' (-3,322')

Feeling those quads yet? Leaving the aid station and turning left onto the Rainbow Trail there are only 8 miles to the finish, .93 miles on this trail. At the last running (June) the trail was in very good condition and had been reworked recently by the little Forest Service loader. Leaving Hermit Pass Road there is a mild uphill to the top of a ridge and the descent then continues into the valley of North Taylor Creek. Cross the bridge and up the hill, switchback and meet the North Taylor Creek Road. Turn right (downhill) and continue down the Forest Service Road. After only 1/10 mile the Rainbow Trail branches off to the left. There is also a road to the right at this junction (and there will be some driveways ahead) but just keep straight on the main road and down, down, down.

Mile 20.4 - North Taylor Aid Station - 9,027' (-671')

The aid station is located at the road tee. Turn right and continue east and straight down County Road 172. You are now out of the trees. Look beyond the ridge just to your right and just to the left of the last copse of trees. The long white buildings with the green roofs are at the Painted View Ranch. This is now a gentle downhill on a good graveled County Road. Straight ahead in the distance is the DeWeese Reservoir. Pikes Peak is on the horizon.

You will be on County Roads for the remainder of the run. Traffic is usually sparse (1 car every 5 minutes +/-) so use whatever side of the road has the least dust (usually the right side (with the traffic) as the prevailing winds are from the south and west).

Mile 22.2 - 8,364' (-663')

Turn right at the road tee onto Ute Mesa Trail. There is a 164' elevation gain over the next mile to provide a nice break from the constant downhill. A small dip and back up to Hermit Road.

Mile 23.2 - 8,528' (+164')

Just before the road junction is Hermit Road Aid - it's been moved downhill a bit while you were gone - and there are about 3 miles remaining. You came up this way and the downhill is gentle. A Painted View Ranch and the finish are in sight! The roar of the crowd, the flash of cameras, the clanging of bells, the jingle of medals and food! Congratulations!